

Beyond the binaries

A selection of texts from the reading evening about feminism.

Zine by The Barricade

Reading Evening: Saturday 24th of March 2019

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“Our strategy should be not only to confront empire, but to lay siege to it. To deprive it of oxygen. To shame it. To mock it. With our art, our music, our literature, our stubbornness, our joy, our brilliance, our sheer relentlessness – and our ability to tell our own stories. Stories that are different from the ones we’re being brainwashed to believe.

The corporate revolution will collapse if we refuse to buy what they are selling – their ideas, their version of history, their wars, their weapons, their notion of inevitability.

Remember this: We be many and they be few. They need us more than we need them.

Another world is not only possible, she is on her way. On a quiet day, I can hear her breathing.”

- Arundhati Roy, War Talk

Introduction

“Feminism is not simply a matter of getting a smattering of individual women into positions of power and privilege within existing social hierarchies.

It is rather about overcoming those hierarchies.

It is about destroying the gender roles defining what a person should be and how a person should behave based on their genitalia.

We need a feminism that is unrelenting, anticapitalist, one that will never settle for balance without achieving equality, that will not feel accomplished with legal rights until we have justice, that will not be satisfied with democracy until the freedom of each individual is connected with everybody’s freedom.”

We believe in the importance of experiencing reading as a collective act as a form of resistance and in the empowering feeling that doing so can generate. On Sunday 24 March 2019 we got together to share and discuss some good readings about feminism.

We decided to collect and print them together in a zine, that is the one you are reading, in the hope that these texts will be useful for other people that, like us, are refusing to give up to “their notion of inevitability”.

Extract from

Feminism for the 99%. A Manifesto

by Cinzia Arruzza, Tithi Bhattacharya and
Nancy Fraser

Thesis 2: liberal feminism is bankrupt. It's time to get over it.

The mainstream media continue to equate *feminism* as such, with *liberal feminism*. But far from providing the solution, liberal feminism is part of the problem. Centered in the global North among the professional-managerial stratum, it is focused on “leaning-in” and “cracking the glass ceiling”. Dedicated to enabling a smattering of privileged women to climb the corporate ladder and the ranks of the military, it propounds a market-centered view of equality that dovetails perfectly with prevailing corporate enthusiasm for “diversity”. Although it condemns “discrimination” and advocates “freedom of choice”, liberal feminism steadfastly refuses to address the socio-economic constraints that make freedom and empowerment impossible for the large majority of all the subjectivities oppressed by the patriarchal society. Its real aim is not equality, but meritocracy. Rather than seeking to abolish social hierarchy, it aims to “diversify” it, “empowering” “talented” women to rise to the top. In treating women simply as an “underrepresented group”, its proponents seek to ensure that a few privileged souls can attain positions and pay on par with the men of *their own class*. By definition, the principal beneficiaries are those who already possess considerable social, cultural, and economic advantages. Everyone else remains stuck in the basement.

Fully compatible with ballooning inequality, liberal feminism outsources oppression. It permits professional-managerial women to *lean in* precisely by enabling them to *lean on* the poorly paid migrant women to whom they subcontract their caregiving and housework. Insensitive to class and race, it links our cause with elitism and individualism. Projecting feminism as a “stand-alone” movement, it associates us with policies that harm the majority and cuts us off from the struggle that oppose those policies. In short, liberal feminism gives feminism a bad name.

Liberal feminisms ethos converges not only with corporate mores but also with supposedly “transgressive” currents of neoliberal culture. Its love affair with individual advancement equally permeates the world of social media celebrity, which also confuses feminism with the ascent of individual women. In that world, “feminism” risks becoming a trending hashtag and vehicle of self-proclamation, deployed less to liberate the many than to elevate the few.

In general, then, liberal feminism supplies the perfect alibi for neoliberalism. Cloaking progressive policies in an aura of emancipation, it enables the forces supporting global capital to portray themselves as “progressive”. Allied with global finance in the United States, while providing cover for Islamophobia in Europe, this is the feminism of the female power-holders: the corporate gurus who preach “lean in”, the democrats who push structural adjustment and microcredit on the global South, and the professional politicians in pant suits who collect six-figures fees for speeches to Wall Street.

Our answer to *lean-in* feminism is *kick-back* feminism. We have no interest in breaking the glass ceiling while leaving the vast majority to clean up the shards. Far from celebrating women CEOs who occupy corner offices, we want to get rid of CEOs and corner offices.

From the Introduction

This manifesto is our effort to promote that “other” feminism. We write not to sketch an imagined utopia, but to mark out the road that must be traveled to reach a just society. We aim to explain why feminists should choose the road of feminist strikes, why we must unite with other anticapitalist and antisystemic movements, and why our movement must become a feminism for the 99 percent. Only in this way - by connecting with anti-racists, environmentalists, and labor and migrant right activists - can feminism rise to the challenge of our times. By decisively rejecting “lean in” dogma and the feminism of the 1 percent, our feminism can become a beacon of hope for everyone else.

What gives us the courage to embark on this project now is the new wave of militant feminist activism. This is not the corporate feminism that has proved so disastrous for working women and is now hemorrhaging credibility, nor is it the “microcredit feminism” that claims to “empower” women of the global South by lending them tiny sums of money. Rather, what gives us hope are the international feminist strikes of the 2017 and 2018. It is these strikes, and the increasingly coordinated movements that are developing around them, that first inspired - and now embody - a feminism for the 99 percent.

No

by Sara Ahmed

No a short word; a snap, perhaps.

No as negative speech; a complaint.

No what you say when you do not want to proceed; when you do not agree to something.

No as an address; delivered to a person or made against a system or given in a situation.

No what you announce by what you do or do not do with your body; as gesture, as withdrawal.

No as a story of how someone comes to refuse what had previously been endured.

No as political action; how a collective is formed by saying enough is too much; we from a will from a wont.

No as costly; what you are willing to say or do despite the consequences, whatever the consequences.

No as achievement: what we say for each other; what we pick up from each other.

No as what is behind you when you start over; when you try something out, when you go another way.

I have started with a series of 10: 10 **no**'s

Together no becomes a scramble and a scream.

There will be more **no**'s. Politics is the accumulation of **no**'s.

We can return to the start, to the shortness of the word **no**, a small word with a big job to do; a word we use because of what we have to do to create a world in which we can be.

We have many **no**'s behind us: we have rights because of how many said **no**; **no** to how they were judged, not human, less than human, **no** to how they were excluded or sometimes included, **no** to how a world was built to enable the safety, happiness and mobility of a few.

In a democracy a **no** seems guaranteed as a freedom as much as a right; freedom of expression as freedom to say **no**, freedom of assembly as the freedom to gather around **no**. But a **no** can still be dismissed as impertinent in the sense of rudely bold or boldly rude and can be judged as an act of political vandalism. So many refusals are dismissed in these terms; you might be free to say **no** but your **no** is heard as destructive; hearings have consequences (becoming a killjoy is a consequence). One thinks of decolonizing the curriculum, so often framed as the willful destruction of our universals, as saying **no** to culture, to life, to happiness (we can't teach Kant, one headline laments). And then **no** becomes judged not only as how you stop others from doing something, but how you stop yourself from being something.

They might not stop you from saying **no** but they make it costly for you to say **no**.

No can be heard as inciting violence. The police coming down upon protesters with heavy hands, with weapons, do so, they so often say, in the case of violence. But they so often come down on protesters in case of violence, creating the violence they use retrospectively as a justification for violence. This judgement "in case of" exercises histories however it is made in the fast time of a present. When a crowd is a blur of brown and black, a crowd is treated in case of violence very quickly, as if brown and black people by the mere act of assembling are a case of violence.

Whether **no** is heard as provocation depends on who is saying **no**.

Or **no** can be expressed but be inaudible or **no** might even be expressible because it is inaudible. Perhaps you can say **no** because they do not hear what you say; do not, will not. **No** could even be a non-performative: what you can say when saying something would not do anything. I suggested in *Living a Feminist Life* (2017) that agreeing to something can be one of the best ways of stopping something from happening. My example was a diver-

sity policy that was agreed after a long process of being stalled, but that, once agreed, never came into use. A yes can be a path to a **no** or a not; how something does not happen. An organization might say yes when there is not enough behind that yes to bring something about. Perhaps **no** becomes what we are given freedom to say when there is not enough behind that **no** to bring something about. Or perhaps we are given permission to say **no**, or given somewhere to go with **no**, as a way of being contained; you can say **no** in a consultation exercise or a feedback session without that **no** being taken up or even in order that that **no** does not get taken up.

Then: when you get **no** out of your system **no** is out of the system.

This does not mean there is **no** point to saying **no**. If your **no** is contained, you can still hope the container leaks; that **no** might spill out, getting everywhere. If we hope for a leak, we might still have to become attuned to how **no** can participate in the reproduction of what is being refused (the way in which, say, articulating anti-racist statements can participate in the creation of the appearance that anti-racism is permitted, or even that racism is not permitted). We say **no** to racism, however much we can become implicated in the longevity of what we refuse; we say **no** because who knows eventually we can catch something from a word; **no** as catchy, as having the potential to cause more trouble along the way.

But yes, we do know this about **no**:

You need more than a right to say **no** for **no** to be effective.

For feminism: **no** is political labour.

No means **no**.

Extract from

Feminisme de butxaca

by Bel Olid

Metralletes

La meva fantasia és una metralleta.

Quan vaig pel carrer i un desconegut em crida alguna cosa:
metralleta.

Quan el polític de torn fa el comentari masclista de torn:
metralleta.

Quan el bisbe explica als diaris que com volem que no ens violin, si
demanem l'avortament lliure i gratuït: metralleta.

Quan a l'escola es valora fins a l'infinit que el pare de les criatures vagi a la
reunió, però es donen per descomptat les mares que hi van: metralleta.

Quan em fan fora de la feina perquè estic embarassada: metralleta.

Quan em diuen que no m'exalti, que no n'hi ha per a tant: metralleta.

Podria semblar una fantasia violenta, però no ho és; és una fantasia
d'autodefensa. Una agressió suscita una resposta. Ara direu que perquè es
consideri autodefensa la resposta ha de ser proporcionada. És proporcionat
treure una metralleta perquè algú fa un comentari masclista? Segurament
no. Però què és un oceà d'opressió, si no un cúmul de gotes d'injustícia?

La meva fantasia és agradable perquè no hi ha voluntat de portar-la a la
pràctica: puc viure-la dins el meu cap sense sang a les mans, sense vísceres
a les sabates, sense haver-me de plantejar si la persona que tinc davant
mereix la meva ira acumulada. No tinc metralleta ni en vull tenir, només
vull el dret d'imaginar-la.

Aquest dret és un dret que se m'ha negat sempre. Des que ho recordo, tot
han estat crides a cedir, a callar, a treure-hi importància.

Quan els nens de l'escola ens aixecaven les faldilles: són coses de nens, no
en facis cas.

Extract from

Feminisme de butxaca

by Bel Olid

Machine Gun

My fantasy is a machine gun.

When I walk down the street and a stranger shout something at me:
machine gun.

When the usual politician does the usual machista comment:
machine gun.

When the bishop explains to the newspapers that how do we expect not to
be raped if we ask for free abortion: machine gun.

When at school it is given great value if the father goes to the meeting, but
the mothers going there are taken for granted: machine gun.

When at work they fire me because I'm pregnant: machine gun.

When they tell me that I'm overreacting: machine gun.

It can look like a violent fantasy but it's not like that; it's a fantasy of self-defense. An attack causes a reaction. Now you'll say that to be considered a self-defense the reaction has to be proportionate. Is it proportionate to shoot with a machine gun because someone makes a sexist comment? For sure not. But what is an ocean of oppression, if not an accumulation of drops of injustice?

My fantasy is desirable because there is no will to carry it into practice: I can live it in my head without blood on my hands, without guts on my shoes, without having to wonder if the person I have before me deserves my accumulated anger. I have no machine gun nor I want to have one, I just want the right to imagine it.

This right is a right that has always been denied me. Since I remember it, everything has been a call to give up, to shut up, to downplay the aggressions.

When the school children raised our skirts: they are children, do ignore them.

Quan tenia quinze anys i explicava que m'havien cridat porcades pel carrer: tu fes com que no els sents.

Quan un grup de nois em va acorralar un vespre, en tornar cap a casa: no passis més per aquest carrer.

Ningú va dir-me mai “defensa’t”. Ningú va dir-me mai “clava-li un bolet”. Tothom va demanar-me, sempre, que em responsabilitzés d’evitar les agressions dels altres. Que marxés d’allà on hi havia el conflicte o, encara pitjor, que tolerés l’agressió i l’assumís com a natural.

Ningú no va oferir-se a buscar una metrallera i protegir-me. De fet, els que se suposava que m’havien de protegir em sancionaven si no era prou amable, prou submissa, prou simpàtica.

La narrativa de la bona nena que no molesta, que sempre és ben educada, que en cap cas pot recórrer a la violència, ens mata. Ens fa tolerar i acceptar com a normal agressions que, comeses contra homes, són inacceptables. I al contrari, ens fa reprimir respostes que, ofertes per homes, són considerades totalment normals.

When I was fifteen years old and explained that someone had catcalled me on the street: do pretend to not have heard them.

When a group of guys cornered me an evening, while I returned home: do not be more on this street.

Nobody ever told me “defend yourself”. Nobody ever said “hit”. Everyone asked me, always, to take responsibility for avoiding the aggressions of others. To avoid the conflict or, even worse, tolerate the aggression and assume it as a natural one.

Nobody offered to find a machine gun and protect me. In fact, those who were supposed to protect me sanctioned me if I was not kind enough, pretty submissive, pretty sympathetic.

The narrative of the good girl who does not disturb, who is always well educated, who in no case can resort to violence, kills us. It makes us tolerate and accept as normal aggressions that, committed against men, are unacceptable. On the contrary, it makes us repress responses that, given by men, are considered totally normal.

Extract from
Untitled
by fio.na

Is it a feminist act to merely exist and act upon purpose, as a woman?
What does gender have to do with what I do?
Do I identify as a woman, and why?
Because I just am [a woman]?
I have masculine energy too: is my physical body merely a vehicle
for hormones - as I learned as a teenager, "I" am not my hormones -
"I" am not what I "feel".

Why must we genderise?
Why must we categorise everything, each other?
Is that a by-product, a result, of the patriarchy?
Why must I know "what" it is to be me?

Approaching myself in love and compassion and unbridled acceptance,
without expectation or "shoulds", I embrace who I am.
Maybe I never would have questioned that, if I was male.
Maybe my "female" is in my makeup, my psyche.
But maybe, I never would or could have realised or embraced or
contemplated my worth, my "id", if I was anything other than woman.

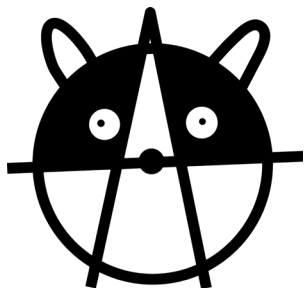
Maybe.

I don't want to be a victim of the patriarchy.
I just want to be "me".

The Barricade is a volunteer-run collective inspired by raccoons and anarchism.

Every Sunday from 4pm to 11pm we do what we can to oppose this capitalist society we live in by being open as a social space with a public library and an anti-foodwaste kitchen.

Our library has a variety of books and zines on anarchism, feminism and queer theory, marxism, decolonialism, environmentalism, squatting and DIY culture. Becoming a member and borrowing books is free. We believe that self-education is a crucial element in the struggle for social change and therefore we aim to provide a space for collective learning – join us for discussions, reading groups and workshops that are free and open to anyone interested!



the Barricade
Every Sunday, 16pm - 23pm
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